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SUBJECT: FM LAVROV CRITICIZES US-JAPAN MISSILE DEFENSE
COOPERATION

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.
4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) In response to a question during a press conference with the Japanese agency "Kyodo Tsusin" on the eve of his October 23-24 trip to Tokyo, Foreign Minister Lavrov said Russia was concerned about U.S. - Japanese missile defense cooperation. Saying that Russia was against a missile defense system that sought to secure military superiority, Lavrov said the deployment of such a system could stir up an arms race on a regional and global scale. He added that, if Japan were to accelerate its military development and build up the nuclear potential of its armed forces, with the assistance of the U.S., it could undermine the strategic stability in the region. He noted that even if there were a basis for concerns in Japan about the DPRK's missile program, North Korean missiles would not be able to reach the United States in the near future.

¶2. (C) We asked MFA North America Department First Secretary Alexei Ivanov about FM Lavrov's statement. He said

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that Russia remained concerned about the U.S.'s global efforts to build a missile defense system. While Russia recognized that U.S.-Japanese efforts were directed at a possible threat from North Korea, and not at Russia, there was the possibility that in the future, they could be turned against Russia. Ivanov argued that it was not wise for one side (i.e. the U.S.) to gain a significant advantage in defensive weapons. According to Ivanov, while U.S. - Japanese missile defense cooperation was not considered a threat to Russia, it was seen as a "strategic challenge."

¶3. (C) Comment: To our knowledge, this is the first time that FM Lavrov has publicly criticized the U.S. - Japan missile defense cooperation. In broadening the Russian criticism of missile defense beyond the European theater, Lavrov has underscored Russian suspicions of a global U.S. capability that the GOR publicly maintains could ultimately undermine its nuclear deterrence.

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